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SHORT THOUGHTS

ON THE

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OF

PROVISIONS.

BY

AN OFFICER OF THE VOLUNTEER CORPS.

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SHORT THOUGHTS, &c.

ANY nation having a strong and sound government, whether that nation is situated on a continent, or on an island, cannot subsist in comfort at home, or carry on manufactures to rival foreign markets, by exportation, unless the primary requisites of human life are at a moderate price, when compared with its surrounding rivals.

The first requisite is Bread; and as it is the bill of exchange betwixt human labour, and the products of

that labour, the quantity consumed must be ascertained, and that information may be obtained without the exercise of excise laws, or forcible inquisitions;—but until the whole consumption of one year with another is ascertained, nothing effectual can be done to remedy the present existing evil of a dear Loaf; because that evil arises from two causes—one natural, the other artificial:—the one arising from the casual succession of three bad years, 1795, 1796, and 1799;—the other, from speculators being possessed of that degree of statistical knowledge, by which is ascertained the exact consumption; and then by means of combination, they feed the ovens

from day to day, and the public markets from week to week, in such manner as to keep bread far above the price manufacturers, labourers, middling house-keepers, schools, and seminaries of education, can possibly afford to pay, without national ruin being the consequence.

When the prices of the quarter of grain are given to the public, the quantities consumed should be returned to Government, so as to regulate the opening and shutting of the ports. In all foreign countries, their respective governments have a perfect knowledge of the quantities of corn grown, and the quantities consumed, and open and shut their ports accordingly.

In Scotland, the judges of assize do the same, and the grand juries furnish the information for that end; they even go further, they furnish a price of exchange for corn, against current money, and settling accounts between landlord and tenant; by these prices, fixed for conversion of corn produced, into money-rent in each county, all accounts between landlord, steward, and tenant, are adjusted. The ports for importation are opened or shut against exportation, agreeable to the known produce of the year, and consumption of the inhabitants.

The opening and shutting ports, as to importation or exportation, when Parliament are not sitting, ought to be

placed in the hands of Government, to whom returns of the quantity consumed in each county, should be regularly made. If this was the case, they could act with such promptitude, according to existing circumstances, that any unfair speculations would be rendered very dangerous to the undertaker.

The quantities consumed being known, one twelvemonth's corn, from the first of December in every year, should be ascertained to be within the kingdom or dominion, else how is it possible to carry on war or manufactures without insurmountable difficulties?

The consumption of corn, in the island of Malta, from its population,

exceeded its produce by five times; Holland by twice; the former, namely Malta, always at war with the surrounding countries, Africa, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Greece, by neutral vessels or importation under convoy, at proper periods, always had bread plenty, and carried on divers cotton and other valuable manufactures. Holland, often engaged in general wars, sometimes carriers, sometimes combatants, subsisted by importation, and imported and bonded corn, making it an object of speculative commerce; and though bread was enhanced beyond the price, when the corn of other countries was imported, by reason of mercantile profits, freight,

and insurance, yet it was regulated so as to undergo little change, and of course manufactured goods did not suffer much alteration.

By proper bounties, when the exact consumption is known, and the due regulation of opening and shutting the ports is effected, what is to hinder the lords and rulers of the seas to import into the British Isles, in single ships, or fleets under strong convoy, even more than their wants, and making super-provision of corn an article of enterprize to send to other countries in want of it? but what is more essential, this will make the Loaf so near the value of that in other countries, that in case of peace, it cannot be an object of manufacturers to emigrate.

One class of inhabitants cultivate the earth; and even those are not secure from wanting bread in inclement years.

A second class of inhabitants work wholly under ground, and cultivate no corn, being more lucratively employed.

A third class of inhabitants navigate, and fish; and are consumers, instead of raisers, of corn.

A fourth class of inhabitants, and the most numerous, are better employed in manufactures, than in raising corn; add to these a crowd of persons who import themselves here for safety to their persons and property, and who are to be accounted consumers.

In war, it is obvious that though

much provision is wasted at sea, and much is wasted on land, yet a very great part of the supplies of food consumed by our army and navy at a great distance from home, are drawn from other countries, which army and navy, when peace shall come, must be supplied by the produce of the British Isles.

It is neither war nor taxation that enhances, in one and the same year, without scarcity, any given article of food to three times its original value.

Instance Potatoes,—it is *rapacity carried on by combination, after ascertaining the exact consumption, and* BARELY *feeding the markets from day to day, that does it.*

Anno 1795 was a bad corn year: Potatoes came into universal use, as a substitute: the people at large were reconciled to the substitute: the public gave premiums for their culture on a large scale. In 1796, they were sold at one guinea per ton of twenty hundred weight, at first cost, and at five guineas by retail, in the capital. The people regretted not the want of wheaten bread.

In 1797, and 1798, combination, on discovering the known consumption of potatoes, took place; the evil, however, had no marked effect till 1799, when they became a substitute for Charity bread: they then rose, by combination, from five guineas to eighteen guineas per ton, till the

parochial gifts, as a substitute for bread recommended by Parliament, were obliged to be abandoned, though there were plenty of potatoes all the while, and, although fine weather brought forward other vegetables.

This year (1800), the seasonable rains, after the summer heat, brought turnips so forward, that in the beginning of this month (November), in the villages near London, they were sold wholesale by the raisers for market, for two-pence-halfpenny per bunch to the market contractors, on whose account they were pitched in Covent-Garden, and other markets of the metropolis. And in one and the same morning, they were carried out again to the very hamlets where

they grew, and retailed by hucksters to the very persons whose labour raised them, at five-pence per bunch, or cent. per cent. profit; which seems too large a profit, considering there are three vegetable market days per week. This trade, therefore, yields a profit upon the capital employed by such dealers, every year, of upwards of one hundred and fifty times cent. per cent.

Remedies are wanted, and Parliament have a duty to fulfil on this and such like subjects.

The inclosing of waste lands, a plan beneficial in prospect, cannot procure the relief immediately wanted, which may be obtained by bringing corn from America, Russia,

Poland, Prussia, Barbary, Sardinia, Sicily; and perhaps Egypt, Turkey, and Greece.

To conclude; with a reasonable priced Loaf, &c. procured by the means suggested, war and manufactures may be both carried on: without it, neither to advantage: not even defensive war, against predatory republican opponents, who wage war on principles so hostile to our constitution, in church and state; which, however, in still more difficult times, we have had the glory to maintain.

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